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WILLIAMS, GRETCHEN VAN LOON. Interrelationships of Light and Space within the Still-life Painting and the figure Drawing. (1976)  
Directed by: Walter Barker. Pp. 3.

This Master of Fine Arts thesis of paintings and drawings was exhibited in the Weatherspoon Art Gallery of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro from April 18 through May 9, 1976.

A 35mm color transparency of each work is on file at the Walter C. Jackson Library at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

INTERRELATIONSHIPS OF LIGHT AND SPACE

WITHIN THE STILL-LIFE PAINTING

AND THE FIGURE DRAWING

by

Gretchen Van Loon Williams

A Thesis Submitted to  
the Faculty of the Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Fine Arts

Greensboro  
1976

Approved by

Wayne Barker  
Thesis Adviser

This thesis has been approved by the following committee  
of the Faculty of the Graduate School at the University of  
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Richard C. Smith

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April 14, 1976  
Date of Acceptance by Committee

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express deep appreciation for the teaching, guidance, and encouragement of my thesis advisor, the members of my thesis committee, and others within the university's art department with whom I have been privileged to work.

# CATALOGUE

1. Untitled #1, 1975	20 1/2 x 24 3/4 inches	Oil on canvas
2. Untitled #2, 1976	12 1/2 x 14 1/2 inches	Oil on canvas
3. Untitled #3, 1976	12 3/4 x 14 1/2 inches	Oil on canvas
4. Untitled #4, 1976	12 1/2 x 12 1/2 inches	Oil on canvas
5. Untitled #5, 1976	12 1/2 x 14 1/2 inches	Oil on canvas
6. Untitled #6, 1976	12 1/2 x 14 inches	Oil on canvas
7. Untitled #7, 1975	17 1/8 x 19 3/4 inches	Pencil on paper
8. Untitled #8, 1976	19 x 22 3/8 inches	Pencil on paper
9. Untitled #9, 1976	19 3/4 x 23 1/4 inches	Pencil on paper
10. Untitled #10, 1975	20 x 23 1/4 inches	Pencil on paper
11. Untitled #11, 1975	20 x 23 3/8 inches	Pencil on paper
12. Untitled #12, 1975	21 x 23 inches	Pencil on paper
13. Untitled #13, 1975	18 7/8 x 20 inches	Pencil on paper
14. Untitled #14, 1974	17 x 23 1/4 inches	Pencil on paper
15. Untitled #15, 1976	20 1/2 x 23 3/8 inches	Pencil on paper

My Master of Fine Arts thesis is built around two genre, still-life and the human figure, in a representational style that is catagorically classical with an impressionistic skew. It implies, however, neither a singularly literal rendering nor a deliberately analytical diffusion of forms or colors. It is, rather, a very general composite of both resolutions employed with care not to pin-point either in such a way as to risk "freezing" the work in a kind of stylistic rigidity that does a direct disservice to both classicism and impressionism. The still-life presentation of oil paintings emanates from the investigation of two types of objects and surroundings propounding one theme.

Thematically the paintings depict the nuances of natural daylight upon objects - most of them near white in color and in an environment of similar color. The two divisions of still-life subject matter circumscribed within this theme are as follows:

1. Objects and their settings carefully selected and arranged to form a unified grouping in a specific space and light situation in order to capture a particular spatial and luminary effect.
2. Objects (basically immovable or fixed) found within their pre-existent environment and chosen because of the way in which they work with their already established space and light as a unit controlled only by the ways I have transferred their united image to the canvas.

The arranged objects are, for the most part, organic, natural forms against a setting of manufactured forms put together in such a way as to allow the light not only to fuse these disparate elements, but also to give these immobile objects a sense of suspended animation.

The environmentally fixed objects - all originally installed in a forty-six-year-old house - I find curiously provocative because of their equivocal states of being, such as their vulnerability to age and constant use, their aura of somewhat menacing invincibility, their ugly or elegant, plain or ornate shapes which in light and space give off an

ephemeral fragility that transcends their utilitarian solidarity. The light conditions are unarranged so that the objects can be represented as they appear in their preordained places on the wall, their spacial relationships to other fixed properties recorded rather than manipulated. My decisions about placement, size, and portion (whole or cropped) on the canvas or paper are the result of spatial conceptions brought on by the objects' connotations, as described.

The canvases vary in size from approximately 12" x 12" to 19" x 22". These dimensions are, for me, the most comfortably suited in scale to the afore-mentioned resolutions of the theme and its divisions. The oil paint is applied directly on the white ground of a glue-sized support upon which the still-life has been minimally drawn in transparent blue or brown pigment or charcoal. The paint is taken at times directly from the tube but more often mixed with a medium made of equal parts of damar varnish, linseed oil, and turpentine. A limited glazing technique is used for certain areas, particularly parts of the backgrounds where an airy, translucent effect or a feeling of distance is desired. Particular attention is devoted to seeing the differentiation of the colors among the whites and daring to place them on canvas without exaggerating local color. This search and subsequent recording requires a disciplined optical transformation within my mind's eye, allowing a way of seeing that breaks the mind-set which orients one toward the assumption that all white objects retain the same hue even if not the same value. In essence, the range of whites in my paintings is polychromatic rather than monochromatic. This polychromaticism, nevertheless, permits a variety of grays simultaneously determined by value as well as hue. The brush strokes are usually smoothed rather than textured through a more generous use of sable brushes than bristle ones. The brushes are selected according to the desired effect upon volume or line with a leaning toward a softness in the character of the painting rather than a hard-edged look.

The figure drawings are done in HB to 2B graphite pencils on medium grained Strathmore drawing paper. Dark or light, heavy or spare, compact or fractured line and modeling define the figure in space, the projecting and receding parts of the body, and a three-dimensional illusion within



a two-dimensional prescription. The figure drawings comprise a more emphatic neoclassical expression than do the other components of my thesis, with an occasional lean toward mannerism.

The works of the following artists influence my decisions and commitments with respect to my own work. The artists are listed along with the qualities of expression in their art which serve as specific points of reference for me. These qualities are, of course, in varying degrees interchangeable among them - a constant consideration also in my mind's registration when viewing or thinking about them.

Painting: Vermeer - light's transfiguration of setting; spatial depth; perspective

Manet - color of neutrals, especially grays; his direct style of painting

Murch - textural softness, luminosity, and choices of subject matter, i.e. - combinations of objects not generally associated with each other but complimentary or mysterious adjuncts in his treatment of them

Drawing: Degas - lyrical sensibility, volume, value gradations

Kollwitz - blacks; bold surity of stroke and modeling

There are many other artists with whom I have strong psychological, as well as visual affinities. However, those listed above speak most directly to my emulatory drives at this time.

The paintings and drawings included in this thesis exhibition evolve in large part from a three-year program of study grounded in the traditional, pictorial approach to art, which consciously provides a foundation for my interest in building works which convey a strong, poetic sense of space and light.